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THE ILLUSION OF "ORDINARY LIFE"

(continued)

In order to understand how a world corresponding to the materialist conception, at least up to a certain point, can have some effective existence in the very period in which this conception reigns, one must consider that the human order and the cosmic order are not separated, as modern people imagine all too easily, but are on the contrary closely linked, in such a way that each of them constantly reacts upon the other, and that there is always a correspondence between their respective states. This consideration is essentially implied in the entire doctrine of cycles, and without it the traditional data relating to that doctrine would be entirely unintelligible; the relationship that exists between certain critical phases of the history of humanity and certain cataclysms occurring according to determined astronomical periods is perhaps the most striking example of this, but it goes without saying that this is only an extreme case of these correspondences, which in reality exist in a continuous manner, even though they are doubtless less apparent so long as things are modified only gradually and almost imperceptibly.

That being so, we may say that, in the course of cyclical development, cosmic manifestation as a whole, and consequently with it the human mentality that is included therein, follows a "descending" course, in the sense of a gradual distancing from the Principle, thus from primordial spirituality. This course may therefore be described as a sort of progressive "materialization" of the cosmic milieu itself, and it is only when this "materialization" has reached a certain degree, already very strongly accentuated, that the materialist conception can appear

correlatively in man, as well as the general attitude that corresponds to it in practice and that conforms, as we have said, to the representation of what is called “ordinary life”; moreover, without this “materialization,” all this would not even have the least appearance of justification, for ambient reality would bring it at every instant denials that are too manifest. The very idea of “matter,” such as the moderns understand it, could truly arise only under these conditions; what it expresses is moreover only a “limit” which, in the “descent” in question, can never be reached in fact, for a world in which there would be something truly “inert” would immediately cease to exist by that very fact; this idea is therefore indeed the most illusory that could be, since it does not correspond even to the lowest degree of reality, but only to that which is, if one may express it thus, below all reality.

One could also say, in other terms, that “materialization” exists as a tendency, but that “materiality,” which would be the complete outcome of this tendency, is an unrealizable state; from this there follows, among other consequences, that the mechanical laws theoretically formulated by modern science are never susceptible of exact and rigorous application to the conditions of experience, where there always subsist elements that necessarily escape them, even in the phase in which the role of these elements is in a certain way reduced to a minimum. It is therefore never a matter of anything more than an approximation, which, in this phase, and subject to the reservation of cases that have then become exceptional, may be sufficient for immediate practical needs, but which nonetheless implies a very gross simplification, which deprives it of all value as a “science” in the true sense of that word; and it is also by virtue of this same approximation that the sensible world can take on the appearance of a “closed system,” both in the eyes of physicists and in the course of events that constitute “ordinary life.”

To arrive at this point, it is necessary that man, as a result of the “materialization” of which we have just spoken, should have lost the use of the faculties that would normally allow him to go beyond the limits of the sensible world; for, even if this world is really surrounded by thicker partitions, one might say, than it was in its earlier states, it

nonetheless remains true that there can never be anywhere an absolute separation between different orders of existence; such a separation would have the effect of cutting off from reality itself the domain that it enclosed, so that, here again, the existence of this domain, that is to say of the sensible world in the case in question, would immediately vanish.

One might moreover ask how such a complete and general atrophy of certain faculties could effectively have come about; for this, it was necessary that man be led to focus all his attention exclusively on sensible things, and it is from this that the work of deviation that one might call the "fabrication" of the modern world must necessarily have begun, and which, of course, could succeed only precisely at this phase of the cycle and by using, in a "diabolical" manner, the present conditions of the milieu itself. Whatever the case may be on this last point, one cannot sufficiently admire the solemn silliness of certain declamations dear to scientific popularizers, who delight in affirming at every opportunity that modern science constantly pushes back the limits of the known world, which is exactly the opposite of the truth: never have these limits been so narrow as they are in the conceptions admitted by this so-called profane science, and never had the world nor man been so diminished, to the point of being reduced to simple corporeal entities, deprived, by hypothesis, of the least communication with any other order of reality.

There is moreover still another aspect of the question, reciprocal and complementary to the one we have considered up to this point: man is not reduced, in all this, to the role of a simple spectator, who would have to content himself with forming a more or less true, or more or less false, idea of what takes place around him; he himself is one of the factors that intervene actively in the modifications of the world in which he lives; and we could add that he is even a particularly important factor therein, by reason of the "central" position that he happens to occupy in this world. Consequently, the materialist conception, once it has been formed and spread in some manner, can only contribute to reinforcing still further this "solidification" of the world that first rendered it possible, and all the consequences that derive from this conception tend

only toward this end.

We are not referring here only to the direct and all too evident results of industrial and mechanical activity, but also to the much more general reactions of the cosmic milieu itself in the presence of the attitude adopted by man toward it. One may truly say that certain aspects of reality conceal themselves from anyone who envisages it in a profane and materialist manner, and render themselves inaccessible to his observation; this is not merely a manner of speaking that is more or less "imagistic," as some might be tempted to believe, but rather the pure and simple expression of a fact, just as it is a fact that animals flee before someone who manifests a hostile attitude toward them; and this is why there are things that will never be able to be observed by materialist or positivist "scientists," which naturally confirms them still further in their belief in the validity of their conceptions, whereas this is nonetheless only an effect of these conceptions themselves.

This is, in a certain way, the "counterpart" of the limitation of the faculties of the human being to those that relate solely to the corporeal modality: by this limitation, he becomes, as we were saying, incapable of leaving the sensible world; by what is now in question, he moreover loses every occasion of noting a manifest intervention of suprasensible elements within the sensible world itself; and thus there is completed for him, as far as is possible, the "closure" of this world, within which it may seem that "ordinary life" henceforth has only to unfold without disturbance and without unforeseen accidents, in the manner of the movements of a perfectly regulated "mechanism"; does modern man, after having "mechanized" the world that surrounds him, not aim at "mechanizing" himself as best he can, in all the modes of activity that remain open to his narrowly limited nature?

Nevertheless, the "solidification" of the world, however far it may be pushed, can never be complete, and there are limits beyond which it cannot go, since, as we have said above, its extreme outcome would be incompatible with any real existence, even of the lowest degree; and even, as this "solidification" advances, it becomes only ever more

precarious, for the lowest reality is also the most unstable; the ever-increasing rapidity of changes in the present world moreover bears witness to this in an all too eloquent manner.

Nothing can prevent there from being “fissures” in this supposed “closed system,” which moreover has, by its “mechanical” character, something artificial that is scarcely of a nature to inspire confidence in its duration; and at the present moment itself, there are multiple indications that show precisely that its unstable equilibrium is on the point of being broken, so that what we were saying earlier about the materialism and the “mechanism” of the modern epoch could almost already be put in the past, even though its practical consequences might continue to develop for some time yet.

This is so true that, at the moment at which we are, the very notion of “matter” seems to be in the process of vanishing. Only, unfortunately, since the cyclical “descent” is not yet completed, the “fissures” in question can scarcely occur except from below; in other words, what “interferes” in this way with the sensible world is nothing other than inferior psychism, in what it has that is most destructive and most dissolving; hence it is not difficult to understand that everything that tends to favor and to extend these “interferences” corresponds, consciously or unconsciously, only to a new phase of the deviation of which materialism represented a less “advanced” stage, whatever the appearances may be.

The derisory security of “ordinary life” is indeed strongly threatened, and one will doubtless see more and more clearly that it was only an illusion; but is there really reason to rejoice in this, if it is only in order to fall into another illusion still worse than that one, that of a “spirituality in reverse,” of which the various “neo-spiritualist” movements that we have seen arise and develop up to now are still only very weak and mediocre precursors?

THE EXIT FROM THE CAVE

The final exit from the initiatic cave, considered as representing the "exit from the cosmos," seems, according to what we have said previously, to have to be effected normally through an opening situated in the vault, and at its very zenith; we recall that this upper door, which is sometimes traditionally designated as the "solar hub" and also as the "cosmic eye," corresponds, in the human being, to the Brahma-randhra and to the crown of the head. However, despite the references to solar symbolism that are encountered in such cases, one might say that this "axial" and "zenithal" position relates more directly, and doubtless also more primitively, to a polar symbolism: this point is that at which, according to certain "operative" rituals, the "plumb line of the Great Architect" is suspended, which marks the direction of the "Axis of the World," and it is then identified with the polar star itself[1].

It should also be remarked that, for the exit to be able to be effected in this way, it is necessary that a stone of the vault be removed at this very place; and this stone, by the very fact that it occupies the summit, has in the architectural structure a special and even unique character, for it is naturally a "keystone"; this observation is not without importance, although this is not the place to insist further upon it[2].

In fact, it seems rather rare that what we have just said is observed literally in initiatic rituals, although one may nonetheless find a few examples of it[3]; this rarity may moreover be explained, at least in part,

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1 We recall in this regard that, according to the Far-Eastern tradition, the polar star represents the seat of the "Great Unity" (Tai-yi); at the same time, if one must normally envisage the axis in a vertical position as we have just said, it also corresponds to the "Great Ridge" (Tai-ki), that is to say to the summit of the celestial vault or of the "roof of the world."

2 This relates more particularly to the symbolism of Royal Arch Masonry; we would also refer, on this subject, to the note found at the end of our article on The Tomb of Hermes (December 1936 issue, p. 473).

3 In the high degrees of Scottish Masonry, this is the case in the 13th degree, called that of the "Royal Arch," but which must not be confused, despite certain partial similarities, with what, in English Masonry, constitutes Arch Masonry as distinguished from Square Masonry; the "operative" origins of the Scottish degree in question are moreover much less clear; the 14th degree, or "Grand Scottish of the Sacred Vault," is likewise conferred "in an underground and vaulted place." It should be noted, in this regard, that in all these high degrees there are many data of diverse origins, which have not always been preserved integrally nor without confusion, so that, in their present state, their real nature is often rather difficult to determine exactly.

by certain difficulties of a practical order, and also by the need to avoid a confusion that risks arising in such cases[4]. Indeed, if the cave has no other exit than this one, it will have to serve for entry as well as for exit, which is not in conformity with its symbolism; logically, the entry should rather be found at a point opposite to that one along the axis, that is to say in the ground, at the very center of the cave, which one would reach by an underground path.

However, on the other hand, such a mode of entry would not be suitable for the "greater mysteries," for it properly corresponds only to the initial stage, which has then been passed for a long time already; one would therefore rather have to suppose that the recipient, having entered by this underground path to receive initiation into the "lesser mysteries," then remains in the cave until the moment of his "third birth," when he exits definitively through the upper opening: this is theoretically admissible, but is obviously not susceptible of being put into practice in an effective manner[5].

There exists in reality another solution, which involves considerations in which solar symbolism this time takes the preponderant place, although traces of polar symbolism remain there still quite clearly apparent; there is there, in sum, a sort of combination, and almost of fusion, between these two modalities, as we indicated at the end of our preceding article. What is essentially important to remark in this regard is the following: the vertical axis, insofar as it joins the two poles, is evidently a North–South axis; in the passage from polar symbolism to solar symbolism, this axis must in a certain way be projected onto the zodiacal plane, but in such a way as to preserve a certain correspondence, one might even say an equivalence as exact as possible, with the primitive polar axis[6].

4 T his confusion exists in fact in the Scottish degrees that we have just mentioned: the "underground vault" there being "without doors or windows," one can enter, as well as exit, only through the single opening made at the summit of the vault.

5 In a certain sense one may say that the "lesser mysteries" correspond to the earth (human state) and the "greater mysteries" to heaven (supra-individual states); hence also, in certain cases, a symbolic correspondence established with the geometric forms of the square and the circle (or those derived from them), which the Far-Eastern tradition, in particular, relates respectively to earth and to heaven; this distinction is found again, in the West, in that of Square Masonry and Arch Masonry that we mentioned earlier.

6 It is to this same passage from one symbolism to the other that there relates the "transfer" of certain constellations from the polar region to the zodiacal region to which we have alluded elsewhere (see The King

Now, in the annual cycle, the winter and summer solstices are the two points that correspond respectively to North and South in the spatial order, just as the spring and autumn equinoxes correspond to East and West; the axis that will fulfill the required condition is therefore that which joins the two solstitial points; and one may say that this solstitial axis will then play the role of a relatively vertical axis, which it indeed is in relation to the equinoctial axis[7]. The solstices are truly what one may call the poles of the year; and these poles of the temporal world, if it is permitted to express it thus, substitute themselves here, by virtue of a real and in no way arbitrary correspondence, for the poles of the spatial world; they are moreover naturally in direct relation with the course of the sun, whereas the poles in the proper and ordinary sense of the word are, on the contrary, entirely independent of it; and thus the two symbolic modalities of which we have spoken are linked one to the other as clearly as possible.

That being so, the "cosmic" cave may have two "zodiacal" doors, opposed along the axis that we have just envisaged, thus corresponding respectively to the two solstitial points, and of which one will serve as entry and the other as exit; in fact, the notion of these two "solstitial doors" is found explicitly in most traditions, and a considerable symbolic importance is generally attached to them. The door of entry is sometimes designated as the "door of men," these being able in this case to be initiates into the "lesser mysteries" just as well as simple profanes, since they have not yet passed beyond the human state; and the door of exit is then designated, by opposition, as the "door of the gods," that is to say that through which pass only the beings who have access to supra-individual states. It remains only to determine to which of the two solstices each of these two doors corresponds; but this question, in order to receive the developments that it involves, still deserves to be treated separately, and we shall examine it more particularly in a forthcoming article.

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of the World, pp. 115–116).

7 We do not have to concern ourselves here with the fact that, among the different traditional forms, there are some that give the year a solstitial point of departure and others an equinoctial point of departure; we shall say only that the predominance thus attributed to solstices or equinoxes again finds its reason in the consideration of different cyclical periods, to which these traditional forms must be related more particularly.